

Message Text

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51

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3144

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 1132

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PN, CS, CO, VE

SUBJ: MARCH 23 CHIEFS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING IN PANAMA

SUMMARY. THE MARCH 23 MEETING IN PANAMA OF THE CHIEFS OF GOVERNMENT OF COLOMBIA, VENEZUELA, COSTA RICA AND PANAMA HAS BEEN PUBLICLY CONFIRMED BY CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT TORRIJOS AND IN PRIVATE TO ME BY FOREIGN MINISTER TACK. TACK TOLD ME THAT PRESIDENTS PEREZ AND ODUBER WOULD USE THE OCCASION TO OFFER THEIR GOOD SERVICES TO RESOLVE THE URRUTIA-THOMSON TREATY ISSUE BETWEEN PANAMA AND COLOMBIA. DISCUSSION OF THIS ISSUE, PLUS THE GARNERING OF PRESTIGE ACCRUING TO PANAMA AS HOST AND A JOINT DECLARATION OF SUPPORT FOR PANAMA'S CANAL POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE U.S. APPEAR TO BE PANAMA'S OBJECTIVES FOR THE MEETING. END SUMMARY.

1. THE MARCH 23 MEETING IN PANAMA OF THE PRESIDENTS OF COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA, AND PANAMA'S CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT, INITIALLY ANNOUNCED IN COLOMBIA BY LOPEZ MICHELSEN ON FEBRUARY 20, WAS CONFIRMED BY CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT, GENERAL TORRIJOS, ON FEBRUARY 21. TORRIJOS STATED THAT THE MEETING WAS AT HIS INITIATIVE AND
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HAS BEEN IN THE WORKS SINCE HIS DECEMBER 1974 VISIT TO VENEZUELA.

ON THE AGENDA, ACCORDING TO TORRIJOS, WILL BE SUCH COMMON PROBLEMS AS BORDER AREA DEVELOPMENT, MARITIME TRANSPORT THROUGH THE CANAL, AND LATIN AMERICAN UNITY. THE GENERAL SPECIFICALLY CITED LOPEZ'S STATEMENT THAT COLOMBIA FACES A "NEW SITUATION" WHEN A NEW CANAL TREATY IS CONCLUDED - A REMARK THE LOCAL PRESS HAS INTERPRETED AS A REFERENCE TO COLOMBIA'S RIGHTS UNDER THE URRUTIA-THOMSON TREATY - AND COMMENDED THE THREE INVITED GOVERNMENTS FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF PANAMA'S CANAL POSITION.

2. FOREIGN MINISTER TACK, IN CONFIRMING THE FORTHCOMING MEETING, TOLD ME THAT PRESIDENTS PEREZ AND ODUBER WOULD USE THEIR GOOD OFFICES TO ASSIST IN RESOLVING THE URRUTIA-THOMSON TREATY ISSUE BETWEEN PANAMA AND COLOMBIA. TACK, DURING AN UNANNOUNCED VISIT TO CARACAS TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MEETING, WAS REPORTED TO HAVE SAID FEBRUARY 25 THAT THE AGENDA WILL BE FLEXIBLE, THAT A GOOD DEAL OF PREPARATORY WORK HAD ALREADY BEEN DONE, AND THAT HE EXPECTED THAT THERE WOULD BE A JOINT DECLARATION ON COMMON FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES. CONCERNING THE U.S.-PANAMANIAN CANAL TREATY ISSUE, TACK WAS QUOTED THAT A STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR PANAMA WOULD PROBABLY BE ONE OF THE RESULTS OF THE SESSION.

3. COMMENT. WHILE THE RESOLUTION OF THE URRUTIA-THOMSON TREATY ISSUE WILL PROBABLY BE THE MAIN ITEM ON THE AGENDA OF THE MARCH 23 MEETING, PANAMA WILL UNDOUBTEDLY SEEK AND GET ANOTHER DECLARATION OF SUPPORT FOR ITS ASPIRATION IN U.S.-PANAMANIAN CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. ALSO, AS HOST, PANAMA AND CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT TORRIJOS WILL SEEK ADDITIONAL PRESTIGE - AT HOME ABROAD - FROM THE MEETING. THE PRESS HAS REPEATED RUMORS THAT OTHER LEADERS, INCLUDING MEXICO'S PRESIDENT AND CUBA'S PRIME MINISTER, WILL ATTEND THE MEETING. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE PARTICIPATION WILL EXPAND.

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